

TO: Staff Senate  
FROM: Traci Vennie  
DATE: November 15, 2023  
SUBJECT: November 15, 2023, Staff Senate Meeting Minutes

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**In Attendance:** Geri Barber, Shawn Beistline, Brenda Lee Clarke, Bridget Conlogue, Grismeir De Jesus, Peggy Doolittle, Rebecca Dzikowski, Melissa Eckenrode, Kym Fetsko, Lori Flynn, Autumn Forgione, Melisa Gallo, Lucy Grissinger, Meg Hambrose, Rose Ann Jubinski, Sybil Keris, Jonathan Kirby, Kristi Klien, Bernard Krzan, Denise Kuzma, Tammy Manka, Sandina Meo, Mark Murphy, Meghan Nowakowski, Peter Sakowski, Patricia Savits, Daniela Teneva, Patricia Tetreault, and Traci Vennie.

**Not In Attendance:** Brenda Amato, Amy Black, Andrea Malia, and Janet Schieber.

**Welcome:** Mr. Mark Murphy, President, called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM. Pat Savitts offered the opening prayer. Mark Murphy will offer the opening prayer at the next meeting. Mr. Murphy read the Land Acknowledgement Statement. Attendance was checked, an alternate quorum was met.

**Review of Previous Month's Minutes:** The minutes from the October meeting were reviewed. A motion was made to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded, and the minutes were approved.

**Review of Agenda:** A motion was made to accept the agenda. The motion was seconded, and the agenda was approved.

**Guest(s):** Edward (Ed) Steinmetz, Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration

Ed presented a slideshow and discussed budget and funding changes over the last few years due to Covid and in the aftermath thereof. Ed talked about how financial aid has increased over the years in order to keep a Scranton education affordable and keep pace with competitor's financial aid packages. This increase has put a real strain in our ability to grow net tuition and fee revenue. He also pointed out the pronounced drop in online graduate school revenue, about half of what it was years ago. He presented a slide that showed how the University's endowment continues to grow and helps to support operating costs and financial aid. The goal of our financial planning has been and continues to be to have a modest operating surplus each year so we can invest those funds in campus infrastructure and IT related needs.

Ed showed the 2023/2024 budget highlights, and states we began with a 12 million deficit in the first pass of the FY 2024 operating budget. He advised that tuition rates went up 3.25% making the annual cost \$51,534 before financial aid. Mr. Steinmetz informed the senate that the budget was built on an admission target of 1,010 students in the freshman class. He noted that budgeting for surplus is always the goal. The first-year discount rate is 63%; the room rate increased 2.5%; meals plan rates increased 2.75%; there was no increase to the 710 lines; \$1.7 million of budget cuts and expense reductions were needed to balance the budget; the budget included a 5% salary increase; we budgeted turnover savings of \$900,000; The FY 2024 revenue budget is \$267,393,068, of which 77.1% is from tuition and fees; 1.8% from gifts.

Ed discussed future financial planning with a focus on undergraduate enrollment and discount rates with an emphasis on net revenue growth including related room and board. It is our hope that the capital campaign also has a very positive impact on our future financial planning.

The new building will be a center for workforce development and applied research with an external focus to leverage and improve our ability to work with outside groups and the community. Ed states there are mines under the site causing additional subsurface work; and he reiterated the \$16M grant from NIST to assist with the project.

Mr Steinmetz stated he is often asked by staff, “how can we help?” and he mentioned that reaching out to families and making them feel at home here when they are visiting can make a huge impact. Staff should also feel free to reach out to Cabinet members to discuss inefficiencies so positive changes and savings can be achieved wherever possible.

Ed asked for questions and received the following:

- When is new building expected to be completed? Fall 2025, we have an aggressive 18-month schedule.
- We often obtain grants, but the additional costs still set us back. Have we ever looked at a benefactor to help with the ongoing upkeep of a building? There are schools that pitch the endowment to support ongoing operating funds for the building; it doesn't have the same attraction; many like the naming opportunities that come with a new building; we try to focus on what matters most to the donor; we attempt to make investments in new facilities with the goal to offset those costs from new programs and their future growth.
- What are your thoughts about why online graduate attendance has dropped so much? There are now many competitors in the space with very low pricing; we have been disappointed in our on-line partner and their ability to generate leads and enrollment in the programs; part of it is making sure we continue to update programs and offer a good competitive mix and keeping them current; we are focusing on creating more in house graduate programs now.
- With the new building, are there any new programs being considered or are we waiting for the environmental scan results? We are really discussing both currently; some new program opportunities we are waiting to validate with the scan and with others we think we know the need and demand and have plans already in process.
- Can you clarify what you mean when you state the new building is to be external facing? We are hearing a reference to K-12, what is meant by this? Many of our buildings are designed for our internal campus community and our students; the hope with the new building and at the heart of the NIST grant is our ability to better engage outside groups, more K-12 activity with local schools; bring people here and train or educate them on various programs and invite more groups in to utilize our resources and help them excel in their own businesses; for example, utilize our small business development center; our students will continue to actively engage but the new building should also allow external groups to better connect with our campus at a higher level than we have seen in the past. Cyber training programs would be a good example of this.

## **Liaison Report: Patricia Tetreault, Vice President Human Resources**

**Father Marina:** Should have received a note from Father giving us Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

**Cabinet:** Cabinet met and reviewed the health insurance renewal. The renewal was approved at the end of October and open enrollment information was sent out to staff and faculty. We are seeing a 7.7% net year to year increase; this is slightly higher than trend which is 7.4%. We pay special attention to rebating within the plan and look for opportunities to reduce costs in ways that do not have a direct impact on the plan benefits. Our goal is to not make

cuts. Unfortunately, it may eventually come to that. The University's health plan is a "self-funded" plan. This means that we do not buy a health insurance plan from Highmark. Instead, we contract with Highmark as our claim's administrator. Use of their provider networks provides a large selection of providers, and we have the benefit of better pricing on claims. Highmark administers the claims for us; however, the University pays the actual claims costs on our plan. This leaves the potential for high-cost claims. To limit the University's exposure to these large claims, we purchase a "stop-loss" insurance plan to cap the amount the University would pay on a large claim. If a claimant has ongoing high-cost treatment or diagnosis, the stop loss coverage may exclude them from that coverage and then costs associated with that claimant becomes all of the university responsibility. This self-funded arrangement allows the University to better manage the various cost aspects of the plan. Many groups our size manage their plans this way. Our current plan design is favorable in a number of ways and not currently available on a fully insured basis, meaning we cannot buy our plan, it is not for sale; we would have to alter our plan design to do this. There is the possibility that we could get an in the door deal from an insurer, but they could make premium adjustments in the following year, which we would have limited ability to manage as we do now. We could potentially end up paying over what we already pay. Additionally, a state tax is built into insured premiums that is not included in a self-funded arrangement.

#### Questions:

There is a lot of talk about HSAs. What is an HSA, and could that work with our plan? Deductibles? An HSA (Health Savings Account) requires a high deductible health plan which has to have \$1,500 individual, \$3,000 family amount deductible; a health savings account allows you to put money in pretax and it rolls with you. A flex spending account is annual account. Our plan is not eligible for a health savings plan due to the fact that we have no in-network deductible. Since health savings is pretax does this impact to Social Security? It could reduce income for SS.

Can flex spending be carried over? The flex spending is intended to be an annual account and is subject to "use it or lose it" with limited rollover options into the next year. An HSA continues to roll over from year to year.

Cabinet is beginning to look at pre-budget work and the building conversation is going on.

December board meeting and retreat in the second week of December.

Noel Levitz survey has been released. Please participate and encourage others to do so as well. We utilize the data collected by students and by staff to evaluate how we view topics.

Security awareness training was sent out, 69% of staff completed it. Working on follow up to encourage the remaining 31% to complete it.

### **Human Resources:**

#### Open enrollment

Vacation carryover and sick time donation due 12/1/23; Beth to send reminder about these.

Compensation: 5% increase across the board on October 7; then raised the minimum rate from \$13.50 to \$14.00 per hour and also raised the minimum to other ranges effective November 4. We had a small pool of money to use to offset compression. With this cycle, we were able to give 133 nonexempt and 29 exempt staff members a small compression adjustment. The phases of the increases to the structure of the staff compensation program have been seen in 2019, 2021, and now in 2023.

Pro Deo mass and luncheon was held on November 14<sup>th</sup>. Betsy Moylan is a retired faculty librarian and serves as the current chair of Pro Deo. Pro Deo recognizes those with 20 plus years of service to the University. Additionally, at this annual mass, we recognize those members that have passed on. The event used to be on a Sunday, and we saw a decline in the number of attendees. The luncheon was moved to a weekday in 2022 and this yielded an increased participation. This year, we hosted over 30 people, many retirees, the chapel was full, and lunch served.

Sursa Corda Award information has been sent out. Data needs to be collected and reviewed by mid-January to get ready for convocation.

Spring Convocation will be held the second week of February, the date has not been finalized, however February 15<sup>th</sup> is the target date.

Questions: It was noted that Sursa Corda is an award for staff, but we may want to ask faculty for nominations as well as staff.

HR, Payroll, and IT teams are working on self-service updates. A reminder, we will soon be implementing a change to supervisor responsibility for approval of exempt time off. We should be doing exempt time a little differently than how we have in the past. Exempt staff enter time away from work through the portal. Supervisors will be asked to log in once a pay period to review and approve the time entered. There will be an announcement and training on this change to ensure supervisors know the steps for approving/validating/ confirming the leave for the exempt staff.

Remote work topic is still being worked on and Patti noted she is willing to advocate to Cabinet for offices that cannot use the January or summertime that those offices may be able to use it another time.

### **President's Report:**

#### **UGC meeting:**

- No meeting, no report.

#### **Board of Trustees Meeting:**

- No meeting, no report.

#### **Student Government Meeting:**

- Seeking Mark to speak at their meeting in December on behalf of the Sustainability Club and Staff Senate.

#### **Confirmation of guest speakers:**

- Michelle Maldonato, December
- Jose Sanchez and Shaefny Grays, tentatively January

President's Award plaque engraving is in complete.

### **Previous Business:**

None noted.

### **Standing Committee Reports:**

- **Communications Committee:** Co-Chairs: Denise Kuzma and Melisa Gallo

- Communication Symposium received positive feedback.
- Newsletter submission date to be November 17th for all written submissions and space for Christmas party. Newsletter will go out the week of 12/18/23.
- Updates on events are being maintained on social media platforms.
  
- **Election & Membership:** Tri-chairs: Shawn Beistline, Rose Ann Jubinski & Kristi Klien
  - Started looking at the number of senators and statistics from 2011 to present, committee is planning to meet and determine what or how to handle it moving forward.
  
- **Finance:** Chair: Traci Vennie
  - No expenditures at this point.
  
- **Social Events & Community Building:** Co-chairs: Melissa Eckenrode and Lucy Grissinger
  - Christmas Luncheon confirmed and booked for December 13<sup>th</sup>.
  - Full turkey dinner to be served.
  - Dan Cosacchi will offer prayer at the first seating, and Father Marina will offer prayer at the second seating.
  - Taking basket donations.
  - Collecting for Service trips and the Royal Food Pantry.
  
- **Staff Development:** Co-chairs: Geri Barber & Meg Hambrose
  - A live virtual presentation with PNC and HR will be presented on November 30<sup>th</sup> from 2:30-3:30.
  - Working to set up spot for those without computer access have a viewing spot. Open to all.
  
- **Staff Recognition and Excellence:** Chair: Kym Fetsko
  - Sursum Corda Award applications have been done electronically this year. The Committee is working with Patti.
  
- **Ad Hoc:**
  - **Assessment:** Chair: Geri Barber
    - Committee has not yet met.
  - **Remote Policy:** Co-Chairs: Mark Murphy and Traci Vennie
    - Met with Brian to update the policy to meet the needs of the Cabinet. Working on wording changes to get it approved for approval for January. Met on Monday 11/27, wording updated and submitted for review at Cabinet meeting on 11/28.

#### **Items from the Floor:**

- Facilities has requested Staff Senate donate, in the form of a basket, to their holiday luncheon. Lori and Lucy will do it the basket, \$75 approved. Open theme. Basket due for facilities 12/21.
- Question regarding balance of sick bank leave as this was the time last year it became a question if it was being abused due to staff having no sick leave left: Patti stated it has a healthy balance and she will offer the amount in the bank in January.

**Motion to Adjourn:**

- A motion was made to adjourn at 3:31 PM. The motion was seconded and approved.